

# Hermitage Support Group

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## Introduction

I thought that we would take the opportunity to update you on the work of the Hermitage Volunteer Support Group. The group was originally set up on 16 Mar 20 in response to a post on the village Facebook site as COVID 19 began to dominate the UK headlines. There were 3 of us who decided to take the task on and co-ordinate a network of volunteers.

Who are we? Carolyn Purchase is a retired headteacher and active on the Hermitage Parish Council. Andy Murray is a Hermitage Primary School governor and a serving Warrant Officer in the British Army, and Jon Turner is a Commissioned Officer in the RAF. All 3 of us are long term village residents.



## Initial Response

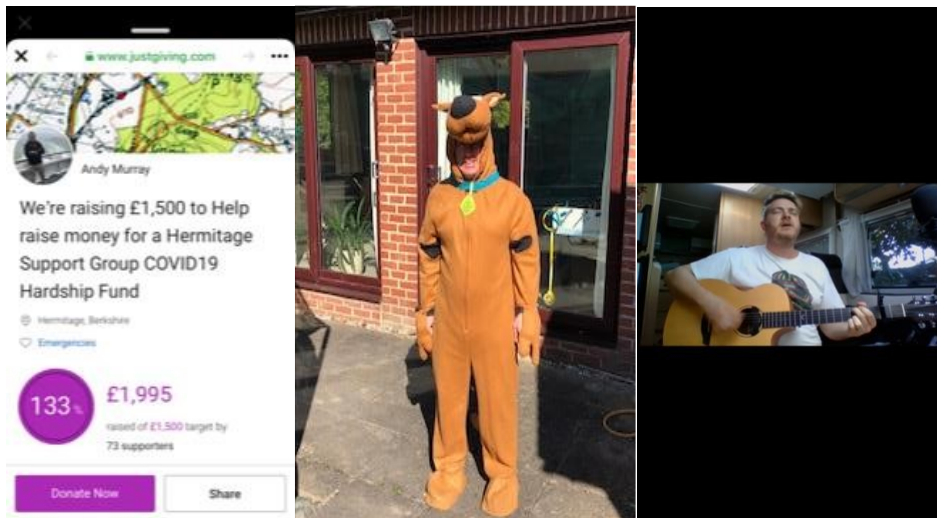
After Andy set up an email address, we went out on FB and trawled for volunteers, grouping them into areas and then put them in touch with each other. We sent out an initial mail flyer for them to deliver to catch every home in the parish. The concept was for a light touch from the 3 of us, and for the groups to solve any issues where possible and refer any larger issues to us and then on the WBC if necessary. It's fair to say we had a huge response with 120 volunteers on our books.

Our initial idea was to act as a prescription co-ordination and delivery service as well as shopping for those who were isolated. Carolyn has since done a superb job in the co-ordination of a smaller group of DBS certified volunteers, who pick up prescriptions from the Downland practice in Chieveley every Friday. The demand has been significant with up to 35 prescriptions being picked up on a weekly basis.



**Kate and Andrea - Two of our prescription volunteers out delivering every week on behalf of residents**

We also wanted to raise a hardship fund and so Andy set up a Just Giving page to raise £1500. In early April and in just over a week the generous residents of Hermitage had smashed Andy's total and to date it is still rising.



**We've had a couple of fundraisers with a Scooby-Doo (aka Jon) run through the village, as well as You Tube songs and a 'front-lawn gig' from a talented local musician, Mike Hawthorn and his daughter.**

## Other support

There are too many stories to tell of how the 120 volunteers have been helping their neighbours. From small pop-ups such as libraries, free eggs, veg and plant giveaways to lately even a live sing-along by a father and daughter after the initial lock down was relaxed. And always there are those who are out shopping for a neighbour. Our local vicar Sue (herself isolating at home) has been phoning around known elderly and vulnerable residents. In short, we have been touched by the amount of generosity that has been shown by everyone and not least of all at 8pm every Thursday.

## So, what's next?

We have already made use of our hardship fund. Carolyn came up with the excellent idea of employing a local business owner, Jane Staunton to batch cook some meals for those isolation, or for our key workers after a long shift. The first ones went out last week and we have been met with tears (of thanks) and positive feedback. A few volunteers have also been delivering food parcels on behalf of **Spotlight**.



**Jane Staunton's cottage pie has gone down a treat and we are in turn supporting her business to provide free meals in the village.**

Carolyn and Andy have also been sourcing and applying for more funds for our 'meals on wheels' and other projects. We have the makings of a foodbank project in the pipeline and we have already had volunteers to support it. We have had many generous donations to date, not least of all from the **SSE** and **Newbury Building Society** whom we would like to thank for their generosity.

**We know that we are potentially going to see more hardship in the coming months and want to be in a position to help our parish. Above all, we would like to thank WBC and the District Council for their engagement and all of our Volunteers for their ongoing support without which these small steps would not have been possible.**

**Carolyn, Andy and Jon – Email: HermitageSpGp@gmail.com 3**